

NEWS

Crystal Ball shines, shatters record

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SOUTHAVEN — A sell-out crowd at the 12th Annual Crystal Ball netted record silent and live auction amounts in addition to honoring community stars whose actions shine like a beacon of hope in their communities.

Tom Pittman, President and CEO of the Community Foundation of Northwest Mississippi, said the wide range of silent and live auction items netted more than \$52,000.

"We think we set a new record," Pittman said. "We had well over a 100 items. The big item was golf and dinner and drinks with Morgan Freeman and Bill Lueckett."

The top auction amount went for \$7,000 to dine and tee it up with the star of "Shawshank Redemption," "Driving Miss Daisy" and "The Bucket List," along with Freeman's business partner, Lueckett, a successful Clarksdale businessman who helped establish "Ground Zero" and Madidi along with Freeman.

Net proceeds from the event are not yet available but Pittman said Friday the Community Foundation of Northwest Mississippi has so far raised more than half of its \$350,000 goal.

Funds may be contributed to that goal by the end of February, according to Pittman to make it eligible for \$1.75 million in matching funds.

On Saturday night, the Crystal Ball honored the 2011 "Man and Woman of The Year" as part of its "Community Stars" program.

The glittering affair was held inside the Arena at Southaven which had been transformed into a Star Wars galaxy featuring 50 costumed characters from six states.

Dr. Michael Minor, a Harvard University graduate who has served as chair of the Community Foundation's "Healthy Congregations Coalition," was named "Man of The Year."

Minor's fitness and nutrition efforts have provided the model for a national faith-based health campaign. Minor also visited the White House at the request of First Lady Michelle Obama to assist with the national fitness effort, "Let's Move!"

Minor will also be featured in the February issue of "Guideposts" magazine.

Minor, longtime pastor of Oak Hill Baptist Church, was honored along with the 2011 "Woman of The Year," Brenda Luther of Holly Springs whose charitable giving includes four tractor-trailer loads of goods for the hurricane-ravaged Waveland community.

In 2011, Luther's Clydesdale Christmas Store of Holly Springs threw a party and dinner for the people of tornado-stricken Smithville.

John Ruskey, owner of Clarksdale's Quapaw Canoe Company, accepted the honor for "Business of The Year."

Ruskey, who offers customer-guided canoe tours of the Lower Mississippi River, focuses on mentoring children who come from highly-distressed neighborhoods in Clarksdale.

The Mighty Quawpaws, a youth leadership program, received a \$5,000 grant from the Community Foundation. The group helped clean up following the Flood of 2011.

The "Non-Profit of the Year," selected was Teach For America, the national corps of top college graduates and professionals who commit to teach for two years in urban and rural schools, a local partner in the education community of the Mississippi Delta for two decades.

That group received a \$212,000 commitment from the Community Foundation.

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Republic Commandos of the Star Wars series of films were among 50 costumed characters from six states who added some intergalactic flair to the 12th Annual Crystal Ball. Photo by Gerald Thomas

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